

**OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.
20508**

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02-108

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
NOVEMBER 8, 2002**

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**USTR Officials to Participate in
Trade and Development Conference in Caribbean**

WASHINGTON – Key officials from the Office of the United States Trade Representative will join Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) and other members of Congress to build strategies for strengthening U.S.-Caribbean trade ties at a conference in St. Maarten on Nov. 8-10.

Josette Shiner, Associate U.S. Trade Representative for Policy and Communications, and Rosa Whitaker, Assistant U.S. Trade Representative for Africa, will be discussing the Administration's strategy for helping developing countries participate in trade negotiations and play a greater role in the global trading system.

The Administration shares the goal of opening markets and liberalizing trade in the developing world, and looks forward to working with Rep. Rangel and other members of Congress on future initiatives.

During his visit to Trinidad and Tobago in September, U.S. Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick met with Caribbean trade ministers to explore their priorities for the Free Trade Area of the Americas, in advance of the November 1 Ministerial in Quito. The FTAA, with a market of 800 million people, would be one of the largest free trade areas in the world when negotiations are completed no later than January 2005.

The FTAA Ministerial meeting in Quito, Ecuador achieved a number of important goals, including the launch of a Hemispheric Cooperation Program that will help small and developing countries benefit fully from hemispheric trade. The Bush Administration will seek a 37 percent increase in U.S. trade capacity building assistance for the region in FY 2003, bringing spending to a level of \$140 million.

The trade capacity-building initiative envisioned under the Hemispheric Cooperation Program (HCP) will help developing and smaller nations participate fully in negotiations and fulfill commitments by helping them to develop and implement national and/or sub-regional FTAA trade capacity action plans.

These plans would assist countries to identify, articulate and prioritize needs related to: (a) participation in the negotiations; (b) strengthening capacity for implementation of FTAA commitments, and (c) structural adjustment needs related to the FTAA. As envisioned, the HCP will receive multifaceted financial and non-financial support from various FTAA countries. These efforts build upon the discussions Zoellick had with the CARICOM (Caribbean community) trade ministers in September.

Additionally, on an important item for the Caribbean, the United States, along with the other governments participating in the FTAA Ministerial in Quito, reaffirmed that the differences in the levels of development and size of economies of the hemisphere would be taken into account in the negotiations. For example, the deadline for the notification of the base rates for the Caribbean would be extended until December 14 instead of the agreed deadline of October 15, allowing the Caribbean to provide their initial offers in government procurement in July 2003 instead of the deadline of February 2003 if they need technical assistance.

At the close of the Quito Ministerial, the United States and Brazil assumed the co-chairmanship of the negotiations through the end of talks in 2005. The trade ministers of all 34 FTAA democracies agreed that the three meetings of the Trade Negotiations Committee for 2003 would take place in Mexico; El Salvador; and Trinidad and Tobago.

The Caribbean region is among the top 20 export markets for the United States with \$5.2 billion in U.S. exports in 2001.

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